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THE WARTIME RESPONSIBILITY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

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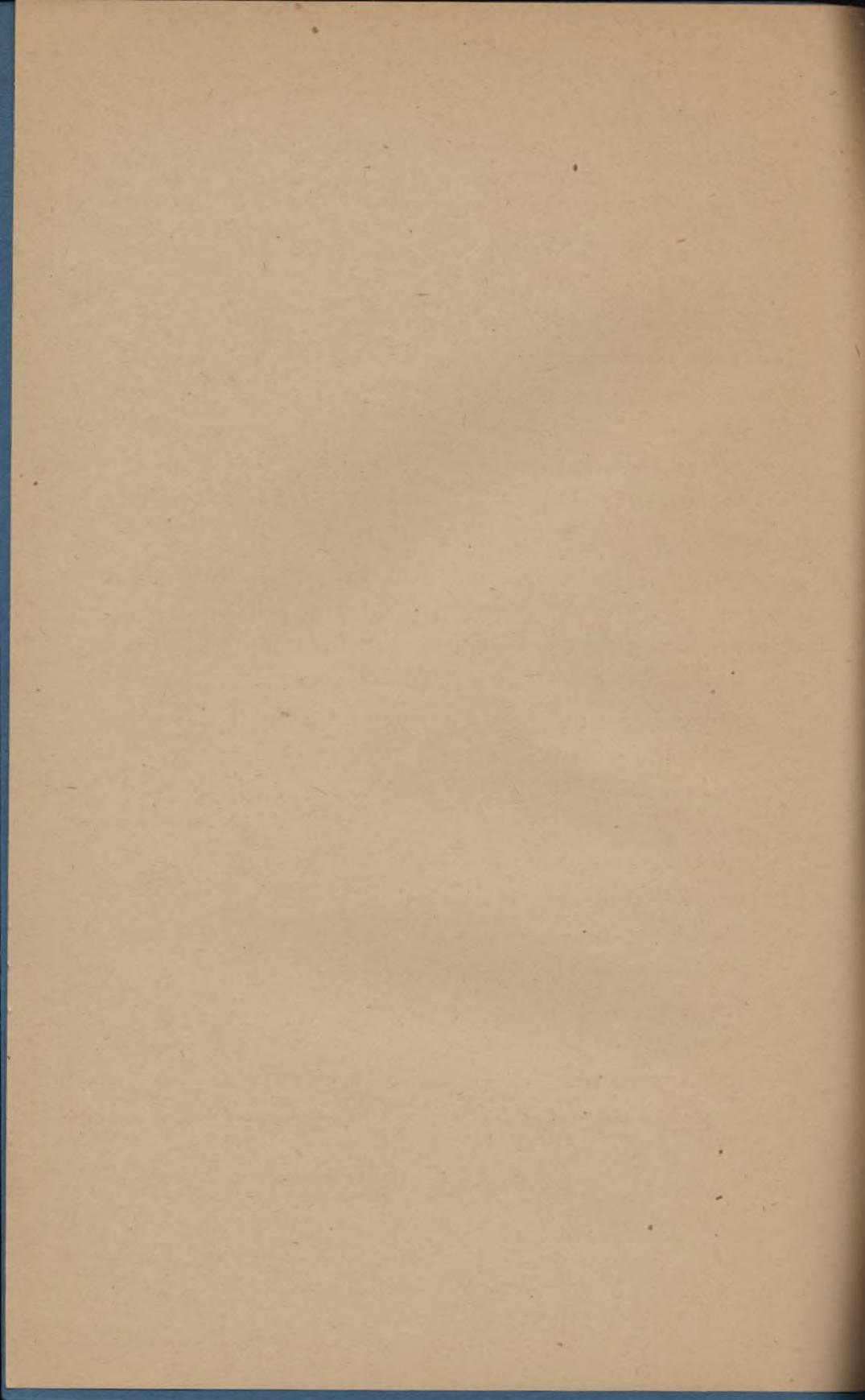


WAR MANPOWER COMMISSION
WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE
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WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS - A SOURCE OF NATIONAL STRENGTH

The membership of women's organizations represents a source of national strength and leadership, which has been of great assistance to the country in the mobilization and utilization of women during this war.

This is not new, however, for women's organizations have always participated in civic and public activities. Club women because of their acquaintance with, and their experience in, their own communities, have always been in position to be of vast assistance to public officials in the solution of local problems, and this service has been of even greater value since Pearl Harbor.

However, the Women's Advisory Committee feels that there are new problems arising where their help will be needed, and this is a good time for them to review their wartime activities, intensify them where necessary, improve their cooperative efforts at local levels, and be sure that they are ready for both today and tomorrow.

The problems of conversion of industry from war to civilian production require serious consideration and constructive planning NOW. Machinery to handle problems of conversion should be in successful operation long before the flood-tide of necessary post-war readjustments descends upon the nation.

Women's organizations are also channels through which great numbers of other women may be furnished information and reached for active service. Since women in the years to come may form the major part of our citizenry, it is particularly important that they should be informed, organized for action, and in action as the need develops.

LABOR MARKET REQUIREMENTS

In July 1943, the number of women at work numbered 17,100,000. That figure represented an all-time high for the employment of women.

In many areas where there was a demand for women at that time, all women who could be recruited readily, were already in the labor market. Due to changing situations in production requirements, and, therefore, in labor market demands, this may not be entirely true in some of these same areas today. In some communities, completion of contracts and other circumstances are bringing about a complete shutdown of some plants and a partial displacement of workers at other plants. In some places, it may be possible to absorb all displaced workers immediately in other local war plants; in other areas, such workers may be absorbed in essential civilian activities long hard-pressed with a labor shortage.

But although the number of women at work in some areas may decrease, the number of women at work in the nation as a whole must increase.

In July 1943, some 29,000,000 women were engaged in their own housework. About 11,000,000 of these women resided in nonfarm areas--therefore, most likely to be near centers of industrial activity--and they had no children under 14 in their households.

A little over three and one-half million of these women were under 45 years of age. It is from this group that many, although not all, of the new regular women workers must be drawn.

Most of these 3½ million women are inexperienced at work outside their homes. In prevailing upon women of this group to enter the labor market, certain resistances must be taken into account.

In many instances, it is the husband who must be converted to the idea of permitting his wife to work. Some object because they feel it a reflection on their ability to support their wives. Others do not wish to be put to the inconvenience of readjusting to changed routines in the home.

Some inexperienced women lack confidence in themselves to do the type of work expected of them. This lack of confidence in themselves may be due partially to their feeling that many employers accept women workers only as "necessary evils."

Still other women are unwilling to do many of the kinds of work for which they are needed, because of a feeling that it is too hard or too monotonous or "beneath" them.

Another resistance--perhaps the most serious--is shown to be a lack of understanding on the part of many women that the great need for their services is bona fide. Though conscious of the fact that men and women in their communities are being asked to take war jobs, some still figure, "They don't mean me."

DIVERSITY IN LOCAL SITUATIONS

As previously shown, war activity is not evenly distributed over the entire country. Women are not needed for the same types of work in all places. In some localities, the most urgent need is for women in war production work. In many other areas, the most pressing need may be for workers in essential civilian trades and services. From all America, of course, women are needed for the armed services.

There is the type of community where, although not officially designated a tight labor market, many workers have been diverted from domestic and other services to the higher paid jobs. Labor here has been scarce in the normal sense of the word, but not acute. Given such a situation, if cut-backs occur in these areas, a condition of surplus labor and unemployment may develop very quickly.

ACTION PROGRAMS

The Women's Advisory Committee urges the heads of national women's organizations to encourage the participation of their local groups in action programs in all communities, where additional women are needed or where problems of utilization make it difficult to keep in the labor market those now employed.

All instructions and published material emanating from national organization headquarters regarding this suggested plan should emphasize the continuing importance of participation in Federal and local manpower programs; but, in order to avoid duplication of effort and the overlapping of activities, local organization and club groups should be cautioned against any attempt to develop programs independently of the government agencies concerned. To be effective, all program planning should be integrated into the local manpower employment pattern, in cooperation with the local War Manpower and United States Employment Service offices.

LOCAL OVER-ALL WOMANPOWER COMMITTEES

Establishment

In some communities over-all womanpower committees have been set up. Where this is true, women's organizations are already cooperating in local manpower programs. It is not the desire of the Women's Advisory Committee to see duplication of effort in any community.

But if organization plans have not already been developed in any community, the Women's Advisory Committee recommends that the local heads of women's organizations, or their appointed representatives, be instructed to work together, and with the local War Manpower or United States Employment Service office, in the selection of an over-all womanpower committee. This committee in turn, will work in close cooperation with the local War Manpower or United States Employment Service office on the one hand and with women's groups on the other.

Joint agreement, concerted action and unified approach to manpower problems will undoubtedly be productive of greater understanding and more specific results.

Further, the elimination of duplicate requests for information or offers of services will make it easier for local government officials to utilize the organized services of women's groups and will insure the women's groups of uniform and authentic information with which they themselves may work.

Membership

Those comprising the membership on local over-all womanpower committees should be women experienced and informed in fields of employment and community problems affecting employment. They might be women from the personnel staffs of war industries, women active in organized labor (representing AF of L and CIO); women from fields of health, welfare, education, training, and similar spheres of activity.

The chairman of this over-all committee should act as liaison representative and work with the local War Manpower Commission or United States Employment Service office. Local War Manpower Commission or United States Employment Service staff could depend upon the liaison representative to carry back information or suggestions for the participation of the local club organizations cooperating with the over-all womanpower committee.

Responsibilities

This over-all community women's committee should be responsible for:

- (a) Participation in organized programs of education regarding the recruitment, training, and employment of women; and for helping develop a program which would conform to the area manpower situation as outlined by the local War Manpower or United States Employment Service officials;
- (b) Help in planning and putting into execution in the community educational campaigns to stimulate active interest on the part of women in accepting training and employment opportunities;
- (c) Providing occupational information to individual clubs in order that club members themselves may be familiar with the requirements of specific occupations;
- (d) Presenting, through cooperation with local War Manpower or United States Employment Service officials, the labor requirements of local industries and occupations in which employers are ready and willing to hire women.

This over-all committee from time to time might also arrange city-wide meetings of women, and at these meetings have the manpower needs of the locality presented by Government, management, and labor officials.

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

The degree to which group participation in Federal and local government manpower programs is likely to be effective will depend upon the faithfulness with which both the over-all womanpower committee and the individual women's organizations and clubs concerned adhere to the following suggestions:

1. Full information and understanding on the part of participants as to what has already been done, what is being done at the present time, and by whom (What other groups, for example, are participating, and what are their special interests and activities?).
2. Full information and understanding on the part of participants of current national policy and of local conditions affecting labor supply and demand.
3. Organizational arrangements approved by the local War Manpower or United States Employment Service officials.
4. Familiarity with the facts concerning community problems, conditions of work, labor standards and wages--so that participation in programming will be geared to the actual local labor situation.

COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE PRODUCTIVE EFFICIENCY
OF THE WOMAN WORKER

Women's organizations can and must help solve many community problems which affect the productive efficiency of women workers. Various Federal and local government agencies are actively concerned with these problems in every community, but they need all the cooperation from private organizations and individuals that it is possible for them to obtain.

The over-all womanpower committees, through their close contact and cooperation with the local War Manpower and United States Employment Service offices, will know what these agencies are. Each women's organization and club, therefore, must work in close cooperation with, and under the direction of, its local over-all womanpower committee.

The following suggestions are indicative of some of the ways in which women workers can be helped to remain in the labor market and work with regularity on the job:

Health. A good medical care program in plants and a sound public health program, a sufficient number of doctors, and adequate hospital facilities in the community are needed to insure care for women when they or members of their family are ill and also to help in keeping them well.

Safety. Skillful selection and placement of women, adequate safeguards on dangerous machinery, use of safety clothing, and accident prevention campaigns in the plant and in the community will reduce the danger of accidents for women now on the job.

Housing. Sanitary and convenient living accommodations reduce housekeeping problems and enable women to devote more energy to their jobs. In communities where government housing projects are not available, aid can be rendered by referral of incoming workers to agencies which will provide information as to proper living quarters. Local inspection of such quarters should result in the establishment and maintenance of proper sanitary standards.

Transportation. Extensive use of car pools, and good scheduling of common carrier facilities, under a staggered working hour system, reduce travel time and lessen fatigue for women workers.

Child Care. Adequate care and protection of young children and of older children before and after school give women workers freedom from distraction and worry about their children during working hours.

Food and Meat Rationing and Distribution. Unless grocers and butchers set aside supplies of meat, fresh vegetables, and any other commodities in which there is a shortage, women workers find the shelves empty at the time they have to shop. Meal planning in advance is now almost impossible and food preparation takes longer. Community kitchens where hot food can be taken out might help solve the problem.

Shopping. Extension of hours in business and service establishments, installation of convenient branch offices, and provision of personal shoppers at the plant enable women workers to carry on household responsibilities, in addition to their jobs, with a saving in time and energy.

Eating Facilities. Plant cafeterias and conveniently located community eating facilities serving nutritious meals, at reasonable prices, at hours coinciding with the time when women workers can eat, are necessary for the women living in furnished rooms, as well as those who cannot overcome housekeeping difficulties of shopping and meal preparation.

Laundry Facilities. In communities where commercial laundries can accept no new customers, some women war workers will have to stay at home regularly to do the family washing, unless, through community action, substitute arrangements can be made.

Recreation. Opportunities for relaxation and social activities must be provided for women workers at hours when they have leisure time, if they are to maintain their physical well-being and efficiency.

Counselling. The war situation has created various personal and family problems connected with health, housing, child care, vocational interests, emotional and other disturbances. Through skilled counselling and assistance, or referral to community resources, women workers can be helped to solve these problems which affect their holding a war job or working at maximum capacity.

Community Integration. Where large industrial plants have suddenly brought to a community a vast number of women workers, new to the locality and the type of work, there has been great resentment on the part of the citizenry to the influx of these workers and its upset to the community life. These women have been made to feel the resentment of their neighbors; insinuating remarks have been allowed to flourish; one bad example has been magnified to cover all workers; and turnover and absenteeism have resulted with constant loss in production and to the war effort. This is a problem that can be greatly helped by interest and cooperation of women's local organizations.

LOOKING TO THE POST-WAR PERIOD

It is the responsibility of every community to see that facilities and services are adequate in quantity and quality to meet wartime local needs. Then constant vigilance should be the watchword to see that there is continued utilization of the community facilities that have been developed during the war. Child care, recreation, and other community facilities that have been established for war should be transferred to peacetime usefulness with as little waste as possible.

Training programs to facilitate the transfer and rehabilitation of civilian workers, as well as members of the armed services, should be checked from now on to see that they include plans for training women as well as men.

We must guard against disintegration of the improved civic responsibility which has been built up during the war. Women's organizations should feel it their duty to lead the women of their community in transferring over into the post-war period the gains made during wartime.

The Nation needs the mobilized efforts of women's organizations now. It will need this organized strength and leadership just as greatly when the last bomb has dropped. It is only through careful and intelligent channeling of the total might of their combined service that women's organizations will be able to perform their maximum service to their country now in the war and later in the peace.

